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ABSTRACT

Examined were the relationships of children's (1) negotiation of play context and (2) enactment of pretend episodes to (3) children's social adjustment, social acceptance and social cognition. It was predicted that negotiation and enactment of pretend play would be relatively independent, and that enactment would be strongly related to indices of social competence. Participants were 30 boys and 32 girls 4- to 5-years-old who attended three day care centers located in urban residential areas of Montreal. Frequencies of pretend play negotiation and enactment were recorded during morning indoor free play periods. Each child was observed for two 20-second focal intervals per play period, for a total of 52 intervals over 1 month. Pretend negotiation and enactment were assessed by recording their occurrence every 5 seconds during each 20-second observation interval. Six measures of social competence were collected: a teacher rating of social adjustment, one teacher and two peer measures of peer popularity, and two measures of social cognitive skill. Findings indicated that negotiation and enactment were positively correlated. In addition, negotiation and enactment correlated with indices of peer popularity. Enactment was generally more highly correlated with popularity than negotiation was. Despite significant between-center variability, findings were generally replicated across centers. (Forty-four references are provided). (Author/RH)

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Negotiation and Enactment in Collaborative Pretend Play: Relations to Social Acceptance and Social Cognition

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Abstract

Pretend play with peers has been hypothesized to augment the social and social-cognitive skills of preschool children. Two alternative mechanisms for this effect have been proposed: first, out-of-play communications with play partners about the negotiation of roles, object properties and actions; and second, the actual enactment of pretend episodes. The frequency of play negotiation and play enactment was observed in 62 boys and girls during free play in three daycare centers. The relation of these pretend components to each other and to several indices of social acceptance and social cognition were evaluated. Negotiation and enactment were positively correlated. In addition, they correlated with indices of peer popularity. Enactment was generally more highly correlated with popularity than negotiation was. Despite significant between-center variability, the findings were in general replicated in the different centers.

Pretend Play Negotiation and Enactment Relations to Social Acceptance and Social Cognition

Engagement in collaborative pretend play has been linked with the development of young children's social competencies (Garvey, 1977; Singer, 1973; Vygotsky, 1967). Experimental training studies have demonstrated that participation in pretend play can enhance children's role-taking skills (Fink, 1976; Saltz and Johnson, 1974), group cooperation (Rosen, 1974; Saltz, Dixon and Johnson, 1977; Smith and Syddall, 1978), and group participation (Smith, Dalgleish and Herzmark, 1981). Observational studies in naturalistic settings have established that the frequency with which a child engages in social pretend play is positively related to peer popularity and social role-taking ability (Connolly and Doyle, 1984; Rubin and Maioni, 1975).

Developmental theorists have suggested that the process of pretend enactment assists the child in forming conceptual distinctions between object and action, and between self and other (Mead, 1934; Vygotsky, 1967). It has also been argued that the enactment of pretend identities and everyday activities leads to the extraction of social rules and to the development of social role understanding (Fein, 1981; Garvey, 1977; Saltz and Johnson, 1974). In this framework, competency in social relations and maturity of social-cognitive skills results from the cognitive processes stimulated during pretend play activity.

An alternative explanation for the relation between pretend play and social competence has recently been suggested. Based on the work of Piaget (1962) pretend activity is said to contribute to social development by providing a context for peer negotiation and the resolution of conflict (Rubin, 1980; Rubin,

Fein and Vandenberg, 1983). That is, through the active resolution of debates with play partners who hold conflicting ideas about the management of the pretend episode, accomodative social-cognitive growth may occur (Doise and Palmonari, 1985). In this view, the context for social negotiation provided by pretend play, rather than the play enactment, is facilitative of growth.

A theoretical distinction between play enactment or "text" and play negotiation or "context" has often been noted (Bateson, 1955; Fein, 1982; Goncu & Kessel, 1985). A few empirical studies have also examined this distinction. Matthews (1977) has shown that pretend play sequences typically contain several non-play episodes or play negotiations which break the "frame" of the pretend sequence and which must be resolved for play to continue. During collaborative fantasy play children were found to interrupt the pretend sequence to discuss role attributions, object identities, action sequences and other play details. Among 4-year old dyads, such "frame breaks" consumed 18% of the time spent in pretend play time. Sachs, Goldman, Chaille and Sewald (1980) also examined the pretend play management and role enactment of preschool children playing in dyads. Classifying the children's utterances on a five-point scale ranging from clearly management to clearly enactment, they found that over 50% of the childrens' utterances were devoted to the planning and management of pretend functions. Management included role assignment, description of the child's own action, directives to the other child, and statements about the activities. It was usually indicated by the child speaking in a normal as opposed to altered voice, e.g., "Let's pretend that ..". Less than 25% of the utterances were clearly identifiable as play enactments. These were typically indicated by a voice change, or gestural acknowledgement of the pretend transformation, e.g., "I shot a big lion". The frequencies of the two types of utterances were not

significantly correlated (Sachs, personal communication, April, 1981). McLoyd (McLoyd, Warren & Thomas, 1984; McLoyd, Thomas & Warren, 1984) observed that metacommunication was more frequent in older children and when roles more remote from reality were being enacted.

These researchers have studied developmental changes in the relative frequency of metacommunicative utterances about play, and their role in maintaining the play. An examination of the relations of these utterances to play enactment, and of both negotiation and enactment to social competence is warranted. Understanding the relation between these phenomena in their natural milieu is necessary prior to any experimental study of their functional significance. In this study, the differential relations of pretend negotiation and enactment to social adjustment, social acceptance and social cognition were examined. On the basis of the literature it was predicted that pretend negotiation and enactment would be relatively independent, and that enactment would relate more strongly to indices of social competence.

The generality of these relations across preschool settings was also addressed. Though collaborative pretend play occurs frequently during the spontaneous play of preshcool children, its relative frequency can be affected by the particular setting (Pellegrini, 1984; Tizard, Philps and Plewis, 1976). Socially skilled behavior also varies as a function of setting and observer (Charlesworth and Hartup, 1967; Connolly and Doyle, 1981). To assess the generality and replicability of the hypotheses, observations were conducted in three preschool settings and the data were analysed for each preschool and for the total sample.

Method

Subjects and settings

Sixty-two 4 to 5 year-old English speaking children, 30 boys and 32 girls, from three day-care centers (n's=21, 22 and 19) located in urban residential areas of Montreal participated. The mean age was 57 mo. (s.d. 6.3) in Center 1, 58 mo. (s.d. 4.3) in Center 2, and 61 mo. (s.d. 4.9) in Center 3. The children were from middle- and lower-middle class homes (Blishen and McRoberts, 1976). Written parental permission was required for participation in the study; acceptance rate was 80%, refusal rate 5% and failure to respond 15%, equally across centers.

All centers served 40 to 60 children between the ages of 2 and 6 years, and were geared towards quality daycare with a balanced focus on social and cognitive development. In Center 1 the children were in a single-mixed age group of 40-50 children in a large divided play area. In Centers 2 and 3 children were grouped by age in separate classrooms. Effective teacher-child ratio was 1:10 in each center. Two centers (1 and 3) were non-profit, the third (2) was private.

Measures and Procedure

Pretend Play Observations: Using a 20-second observation interval followed by a 20-second recording interval, the frequencies of pretend play negotiation and enactment were recorded during the morning indoor free play period. Each child was observed for two 20-second focal intervals per play period, for a total of 52 intervals over one month. Pretend negotiation and enactment were assessed by recording their occurence every five seconds during each 20-second observation interval. Pretend negotiation was scored when the child engaged in preparatory or procedural behaviors related to social pretend play with a peer, explicitly

mentioning a pretend transformation or negating it, but not taking on a role or actually transforming an object. Preparatory or procedural behaviors were concerned with the nature of the pretend sequence, and included invitations to engage in social pretend play (e.g. "Let's play spaceship"), clarification of rights and object properties (e.g. "You have to sit there", "That's a ray gun"), and discussion of roles (e.g. "The captain holds the wheel"), carried out in the child's natural voice. Pretend enactment was scored when the child indicated his/her engagement in social pretend by tone of voice (e.g. change in pitch), content of speech (e.g. "I shot a big lion"), physical gesture (e.g. waving), stance (e.g. angry), or actions (e.g. shooting). Enactment was therefore scored during ongoing pretend dialogue or during transformations and animations of toys and other objects.

To distinguish collaborative pretend play from other activities, the 20-second recording interval was used to classify the preceding 20-seconds as collaborative pretend play, collaborative non-pretend play or solitary activity. The observer first classified the interval as collaborative or solitary. Collaborative interaction was scored if the interval contained a social initiation which was responded to within 10 seconds. That is, if one child successfully engaged another in social interaction by gesture; deliberate contact; verbal directive or request; imitation, or active, directed smiling or laughing, the interval was scored as collaborative. Otherwise, the interval was scored as non-colaborative. The observer then scored the collaborative interaction interval as pretend if it consisted predominantly of negotiation or enactment activity, and as non-pretend if it consisted predominantly of activities in which objects and people were treated according to common and appropriate use.

Observations were carried out by five trained observers working in rotating pairs. Inter-observer reliability between pairs of observers simultaneously watching the same child was collected for 20% of the observations. Kappa reliability coefficients (Cohen, 1960) were .92 for negotiation vs. enactment, and .93 for collaborative pretend vs. collaborative non-pretend vs. solitary activity.

Social Competence Measures: Six measures of social competence were collected: a teacher rating of social adjustment, one teacher and two peer measures of peer popularity, and two measures of social cognitive skill.

Teachers in each center rated the children's social adjustment on the Kohn Social Competence Scale (Kohn and Rosman, 1972), a 73-item rating scale yielding a measure of Interest-Participation in classroom activities with peers (KRI). The teachers also rank-ordered the children in their class on peer popularity (TPOP, Connolly and Doyle, 1981). The median correlation between the popularity ranking the head teacher and that of her assistant teacher in the three centers was .89.

Peer acceptance was also assessed using a positive peer nomination procedure (NPOP) and a likeability rating measure (RPOP). Nominations were solicited from each child using a picture sociometric procedure in which s/he was asked to nominate five classmates with whom s/he would like to play a "special game at school". Sequential nominations were obtained by saying "If (child nominated) weren't here today, then whom would you like to play with?" The test-retest reliability (Pearson r) of this measure in two centers over a six-week period averaged .45. The likeability ratings were collected using the roster-and-rating procedure (Asher, Singleton, Tinsley and Hymel, 1979). Each child was asked to rate all his/her classmates in terms of liking to play with them "a lot", "a

little" or "not at all".

Cognitive role-taking skill (COGRT) was measured by the Devries hide-a-penny game (Devries, 1970), in which the child's ability to take into account the point of view of the examiner is assessed on a 10-point scale. Affective role-taking skill (AFFRT) was assessed by a modification of the Urberg and Docherty (1976) task. The child was shown five pictorially illustrated stories and asked to identify and justify the feelings of the two illustrated characters, for a maximum of 4 points per story. The story themes were: having one's candy eaten by another child, losing a game, the teacher siding with the child in a dispute over a ball, approaching a dog who has just growled, losing a coin and then meeting a friend. In a previous study of 32 preschoolers, one-month test-retest reliability of the AFFRT was reported to be .73 (Connolly, 1980).

Peabody IQ was assessed as a measure of intellectual maturity. All of the child measures were obtained in an individual interview by assistants who were unaware of the hypotheses of the study.

Results

Pretend enactment was observed in 42.8 (s.d. = 22.3) out of 208 five-second intervals, for a mean of 3.41 minutes per child. Pretend negotiation was observed in 9.9 (s.d. = 7.0) out of 208 five-second intervals, for a mean of .82 minutes. The lower frequency of negotiation and brief amount of time spent in each form of pretend might bring into question the representativeness of these samples of the children's behavior. To assess their representativeness, in terms of stability over the one month interval, the internal consistency of negotiation and enactment was computed via Cronbach's alpha co-efficient across the 26 sets of two sequential 20-second observation intervals (Cronbach, 1951). Within

centers, alpha ranged from .34 to .73, with the median value being .66 for enactment and .59 for negotiation. Thus, negotiation and enactment were of comparable and adequate consistency; they were lower in Center 1 than in Centers 2 and 3.

Preliminary analyses of variance of center and sex effects indicated that centers differed significantly in age, negotiation, enactment, teacher-rated Interest-Participation (KRI), teacher popularity rankings (TPOP), affective role-taking (AFFRT) and rate of non-pretend collaborative activity. Although, the centers differed significantly on 7 of 11 measures, these differences showed no consistent pattern, as shown in Table 1. Sex differences were found only in peer ratings of popularity (RPOP), where girls were rated significantly more favorably than boys, means 1.14 vs. .98 respectively. There were no significant sex X center interactions. Because of the differences between centers, further analyses were conducted for the total sample using scores that were standardized within center, and also within each center separately.

Insert Table 1

Pearson correlations were computed between the social competence measures and the collaborative pretend play component measures. Pretend enactment and pretend negotiation both correlated positively with peer popularity. Collapsing across centers, the obtained $\underline{r}$ (60) ranged from .18, ns., for negotiation with peer nominations (NPOP), to .37, <.025, for enactment with peer ratings (RPOP), as shown in Table 2. Correlations separately within each center varied in magnitude but were generally in the same direction, except for Center 3 where negotiation was not related to peer popularity. Correlations with the teacher

measures of competence (KR1 and TPOP) and with the measures of cognitive and affective roletaking (COGRT and AFFRT) were non-significant. Age, IQ, and non-pretend collaborative activity showed few significant correlations with either the pretend component measures or the social competence measures.

Insert Table 2

Pretend negotiation and enactment were significantly correlated, $r(60)=.60$ $p<.001$. Correlations were similar in all three centers, r's = .42, .58, .72. The independent contributions of the two pretend components to the prediction of the popularity measures were evaluated, therefore, by means of partial correlation analyses. For the total sample, the relation of enactment to NPOP was significant when negotiation was held constant, partial $r(59)=.26, p<.05$, but that of negotiation was nonsignificant when enactment was held constant, partial $r(59)=.00$, n.s. The relation of enactment to RPOP was positive but not significant when negotiation was controlled, partial $r(59) = .21$, $p=.10$, whereas that of negotiation to RPOP when enactment was controlled was almost zero, partial $r(59)=.09$, n.s. These results were generally reflected in the partial correlations computed within center, wherein only enactment was significantly related to peer popularity (PPOP or RPOP), holding the effect of negotiation constant. (See Table 3).

Insert Table 3 about here

Discussion

Theoretical conceptions of the value of collaborative pretend play in the socialization process have focussed on two potentially different mediating factors, play enactment and play negotiation. In this study, enactment was distinguished from negotiation so as to examine their independent and joint relations to social adjustment, social acceptance and social role-taking. By so doing, we endeavored to clarify the often-reported relations between collaborative pretend play and social competencies. The results indicate that play enactment and negotiation of play are significant correlates of peer popularity both as measured by peer likeability ratings and, to a lesser extent, as assessed by positive peer nominations.

These results were seen most clearly when data were combined across the three child-care centers. Similar patterns of results emerged for the most part within each center, though due to the small sample sizes the results were often not significant. Combining scores standardized within each center appeared to reflect fairly well the patterns of results within each center, in particular for pretend enactment.

Nevertheless, a noted finding was the great variability between centers, with 7 of the 11 research variables differing significantly. Specifically, teachers varied greatly in their ratings of social adjustment (KR1). Since the two centers with the most extreme scores were located in the same neighbourhood, reasons for this variability are not obvious. It may reflect differences in the attitudes of particular teachers. Centers also varied greatly in amount of pretend play and non-pretend collaborative activity. Such differences were not associated with the number and age-range of children in the free-play group. It is possible that differences were due to the toy choices and play areas available

to the children. That is, the center with the highest level of pretend play and lowest level of non-pretend social interaction offered a block corner, a dress-up and kitchen play area, and table activities, and permitted the children to change area only at specified times during the free-play period. The play space was also smaller than the other two centers. The fact that similar patterns of correlations were observed within the three centers, despite such variablity in overall frequency of behaviors supports the generality of the findings. The variability evident between centers is, however, strong evidence that such differences must be assessed in any analyses combining data from different child-care settings. Without the standard score adjustment used in the current study, combining across samples might have resulted in spurious patterns of results.

Previous work on play enactment and negotiation found that the two components were not significantly correlated (Sachs et al., 1980). In contrast the present findings indicate a substantial correlation. Methodological variations, such as observing in large groups vs. dyads, observation locale, and analysing time samples as opposed to focal utterances may account for these different findings. Nevertheless, the correlation between the two measures in the present study suggests that their separation into exclusive categories may be ecologically artificial. From these data, it appears that children who are socially adept engage in both play management and play enactment. In keeping with Bateson (1955), negotiations may permit the enactment of pretend to continue longer. An important factor may be the flexibility to shift easily from one mode to the other rather than the ability to engage in either per se. A consideration of the relative contributions of the two pretend components to social functioning indicated that pretend enactment accounted for more of the

total variance than did negotiation, despite equal reliability of measurement. From a theoretical perspective, these results are consistent with traditional views of collaborative pretend play which emphasize the functional significance of engagement in pretend transformations per se (Garvey, 1977; Smilansky, 1968; Singer,and Singer 1978). The alternative explanation focussing on the role of the peer interaction context is less well supported by these data. While negotiation was related to peer acceptance, this relationship was not independent of its correlation with play enactment. We may speculate most parsimoniously that children like peers who engage in pretend because these peers provide enjoyable collaborative play experiences. The assessment of such a speculation would necessitate the design of a training study which separately manipulates the two processes. The current study suggests, however, that such separation may be difficult if not impossible to accomplish.

Theoretically, it has been suggested that pretend transformations lead to the learning of social-cognitive reversibility (Rubin et al., 1983). However, in this study no evidence of a relationship between the pretend measures and the measures of social-cognitive processing was obtained. The extant literature has been equivocal in documenting consistent relations between collaborative pretend play and social cognition and the present findings are consistent with other studies which have failed to find a relation (Brainerd, 1982; Saltz et al., 1977). Rubin and Pepler (1980) have suggested that the use of an observational methodology to assess behavioral demonstrations of social cognitive skill might reveal a more consistent relationship with colaborative pretend play. Alternatively, the failure to find consistent relations across studies between collaborative pretend play and social cognition casts some doubt on the role of social cognition as a central mediating variable in the relation between pretend

play and social and cognitive competencies.

In summary, the results of this study provide some preliminary support for the importance of distinguishing between pretend enactment and negotiation in examining the contributions of collaborative pretend play to social adjustment. Although the two components were correlated, play enactment was more closely related to peer popularity than was pretend negotiation.

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Table 1

Differences Between Centers in Pretend Play Behavior, Social Competence Indices, and Control Variables

Measure		Center 1	Center 2	Center 3	F(1,56)
Age	X	56.6[a]	58.[a,b]	61.1[b]	3.84*
	(s.d.)	(6.3)	(4.3)	(4.9)	
NEGOTIATION	X	6.35[a]	13.52[b]	9.34,[b]	5.30**
	(s.d.)	(3.8)	(9.2)	(6.0)	
ENACTMENT	X	28.0[a]	53.2[b]	41.2[a,b]	7.4***
	(s.d.)	(13.8)	(26.2)	(18.6)	
KR1	X	71.8[a]	96[b]	27.4[c]	58.4***
	(s.d.)	(10.9)	(22.6)	(24.8)	
TPOP	X	.39	.45	.58	3.07*
	(s.d.)	(.26)	(.29)	(.25)	
NPOP	X	.16	.16	.16	.00
	(s.d.)	(.07)	(.14)	(.06)	
RPOP	X	1.11	1.07	.98	1.50
	(s.d.)	(.23)	(.36)	(.30)	
COGRT	X	9.58	9.53	9.11	.92
	(s.d.)	(.90)	(1.02)	(1.24)	
AFFRT	X	12.24[a]	15.84[b]	14.5[a,b]	3.64*
	(s.d.)	(5.4)	(3.1)	(4.3)	
PEABODY IQ	X	95.9	97.5	96.8	.05
	(s.d.)	(12.1)	(14.7)	(20.3)	
NON PRETEND INTERACTIONS	X	24.2[a]	13.8[b]	22.8[a]	21.7***
	(s.d.)	(5.9)	(5.2)	(7.4)	

[a]KRI - Kohn Social Competence Scale: Factor I; TPOP-teacher-ranked peer social acceptance; NPOP-social acceptance by peers-nominations; RPOP-social acceptance by peers - rating; COGRT-cognitive role-taking; AFFRT-affective role-taking.

[a,b,c] Means with different superscripts differ significantly according to Turkey's test with = .05

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Table 2

Correlations between Pretend Components and Social Competence Indices (r's ≥ .20 are shown)

	KR1[a]	TPOP	NPOP	RPOP	GOGRT	AFFRT
CENTER 1 (n - 21)						
NEGOTIATION			.19	.52**		
ENACTMENT		.21	.25	.57***		
CENTER 2 (n = 22)						
NEGOTIATION		.20	.31	.39[t]	-.35	
ENACTMENT			.55**	.33		
CENTER 3 (n = 19)						
NEGOTIATION					.39[t]	.29
ENACTMENT	-.26	.21	.20	.31	.24	.21
OVERALL (n = 62)						
NEGOTIATION			.18	.30*		
ENACTMENT			.30*	.37**		

[a]KRI - Kohn Social Competence Scale: Factor I; TPOP-teacher-ranked peer social acceptance; NPOP-social acceptance by peers-nominations; RPOP-social acceptance by peers - rating; COGRT-cognitive role-taking; AFFRT-affective role-taking.

[t] .05 < P < .10
* P < .05
** P < .025
*** P < .01

Table 3

Independent contributions of Pretend Play

Components to Social Competence Indices[a] (r's ≥ .2 are shown)

	KR1	TPOP	NPOP	RPOP	GOGRT	AFFRT
CENTER 1 (n = 21)						
NEGOTIATION[b]				.36		
ENACTMENT[c]		.22	.19	.45*	-.22	
CENTER 2 (n = 22)						
NEGOTIATION[b]		.21		.26	-.39[t]	
ENACTMENT[c]			.48**		.20	
CENTER 3 (n = 19)						
NEGOTIATION[b]	.23			-.37	.32	.20
ENACTMENT[c]	-.34		.23	.47*		
OVERALL (n = 62)						
NEGOTIATION[b]						
ENACTMENT[c]			.26*	.21[t]		

[a]KRI - Kohn Social Competence Scale: Factor I; TPOP-teacher-ranked peer social acceptance; NPOP-social acceptance by peers-nominations; RPOP-social acceptance by peers - rating; COGRT-cognitive role-taking; AFFRT-affective role-taking, df=60.

[t] .10 < p < .05
[b] enactment partialled out
[c] negotiation partialled out

* p < .05
** p < .25